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1 In 2011 the New York Historical Society opened *Revolution! The Atlantic World Reborn*, the first exhibition to relate the American, French and Haitian revolutions as a single, global narrative. Spanning decades of tremendous political and cultural changes, the exhibit traced how an ideal of popular sovereignty, introduced by the American Revolution, soon sparked more radical calls for a recognition of universal human rights, and set off attacks on both sides of the Atlantic against innate privilege and slavery. The novelty of the approach hinted at the problematic ways in which the transatlantic slave trade has so far been confronted and remembered, as well as the complexities of addressing its actual legacy as a long standing international system. The following year Laurent Dubois's remarkable *Haiti, the Aftershocks of History* (Metropolitan Books, 2012) confirmed the strict connection between Haiti's doomed fate and the Atlantic sequence of events over the last centuries. A relevant number of cultural activists, scholars, political experts and artists from different contexts have also tried to circumscribe the specificity of the perception of what slavery has represented for both the individual subject and the collective imagination; and yet, the question seems nonetheless in need of further investigation. True, much time has passed since artists unfolded in unequivocal terms the viciousness of narratives aimed at freezing the horrors of slavery in a barbarous past, declining its contemporary materializations. As a rule, the artist deeply felt the call to revisit slavery in its broadest extent, sketching it out as a varied series of revolutions and agency manifestations rather than as an opaque, uninterrupted line of subjection. Unforgettable acts of re-memory and recreations of slavery imprints in contemporary life were created by James Baldwin, Toni Morrison and more recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates, to name but a few. To fulfill the double orientation necessary to overcome the impasse, all had to sidestep

the perilous numbing effects that slavery casts on the artistic conscience and point out the irreconcilable disunity in terms of manifestations, attitudes, consequences originated by such a crucial, long denied historical reality. If the artist, albeit painfully, seems to have foreshadowed the arrival of better times, or at least of a keener awareness, it cannot be confuted that the often controversial aspects of this multifaceted macro-phenomenon continue to intrigue and baffle the experts' focus.

While some point out, for example, the dualist tradition of the black struggle, i.e. whether it is better to believe that blacks will achieve full equality, or to realize that white racism is so deep that meaningful integration will never be achieved (Darryl Pinckney), others lament the failure to account for the real legacy of the Maafa, which is not 'modern day slavery' but the global structure of racism that continues to oppress people worldwide (Coates, Kehinde Andrews), and still others underline the extent to which the diasporic condition affects the subjective perceptions of the self, the sphere of intimacy and memorial processes (Baldwin, Morrison).

Among this rich harvest of works, debates, conferences, and articles, a pleasant surprise is offered by the timely publication of *Transatlantic Memories of Slavery: Reimagining the Past, Changing the Future*, a collection gathered by Elisa Bordin and Anna Scacchi. With great courage, sharp intuition and professional dedication they have tackled some of the most controversial issues of historical revision and imaginative projection linked to the slave trade all over the world. While stressing the central role of slavery in the affirmation of Euro-American modern capitalistic society, they give space to the dignity and validity of long time ignored acts of memory produced in different fields by people of African descent. The importance attributed by them to these narratives in both written or visual form, are now shown as a dialogic and no less important counterpart to the over-publicized acts of memory written by representatives of the Euro-American hegemonic platform. Through the analysis of a large sample of writings, fiction and non-fiction, films, photographs, popular culture, the authors, a group of renown scholars and artists, question the legitimacy of the kept records, showing that the problem, as William Styron maintained, is not just how to portray the history of slavery, but how "to wrestle with the incomplete project of freedom." What appears particularly relevant in this collection is the methodological approach, a complex, comparative, transnational gaze that rightly pulls down the ideal boundaries of nation and continent, North and South America, Brazil and West Africa, and above all French, Spanish and English Caribbean – where, it should be remembered, the slave trade registers its highest peak – allowing them to shed light on the multiple ways in which difference builds up a privileged path to artistic productions. The mechanics of how slavery affected the intercultural, inter-human, inter-linguistic exchanges between different peoples finds in this broad discussion one of the best possible readings, where the textual and the meta-textual crisscross and contaminate each other; a modern approach that ignores stale categories, narrow paradigms, prefigured evaluations. Among the rich harvest of essays on offer, we find an unusual, painstakingly detailed discussion of one of Tarantino's movies; a brand new introduction to Young Adult literature of slavery, alongside an innovative survey of black and white family sagas both in the US and Central America; an intense "back to Africa" nostalgic trip through the Atlantic triangle, an excellent illustration of Pierre Nora's Lieux de Mémoire together with Édouard Glissant's notion of a Caribbean identity, rhizomatic, boundless and fluid, untouched by whatsoever notion of national

borders, and a fascinating discussion of Brazilian and Caribbean contemporary soap operas, together with rigorous openings on filmic renditions of slavery. The fluidity achieved between disciplines, territories, languages, anthropological characterizations is happily harmonized with a captivating style, that accrues the meaning of the research and the pleasure of reading.

4 In their introductory chapter, Bordin and Scacchi make a daring methodological move, stressing the necessity for a transcultural interdisciplinary investigation, able to capture the multifaceted complexity of artistic expressions, idioms, symbols, traditions, which could not be detected one without the other. Under this perspective no aspect of the English Caribbean Diaspora for instance makes sense without a concomitant confrontation with its French and Spanish corresponding expressions. As Edward Said observed, memory travels beyond national boundaries, so to trace it, one needs to follow its journeys, through acts of "re-memory," which, as Morrison's groundbreaking notion has illustrated, more than a simple reflexive remembrance is "an affirmative action of re-creation and re-vision."

5 A consistent platform of theoretical speculation is provided by the frequent references to French-speaking thinkers, from Foucault to Nora, Glissant, Bourdieu, Ricoeur, Bergson, to quote just a few, which orient most of the discussions and provide the discourse with due rigor. This is the case, for instance, of the analysis of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, imprinted by Renata Morresi on Paul Ricoeur's phenomenology of memory and Henri Bergson's theory of the comic. The unexpected connection may provide Tarantino with a luster he may not totally deserve (at least in his intentions) but allows Morresi to keep her gaze as fresh and uncontaminated as possible, to show how an unconventional and sometimes approximate representation of slavery can inform and expand one's own reflection, adding depth and substance to the general discussion. It is the author's conviction, in fact, that the choice of multiple narrators and unexpected narratives does not necessarily "imply a dilution of the origin" but, on the contrary, signals "the generative power that an event of the past still possesses" (20). A view matched by that of the anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla, who sees Django as an emblem of American modernity: in Bonilla's opinion he reveals much about "the significance of slavery in contemporary US culture, in terms of its refraction on today's social conditions" (21).

6 A very stimulating survey, ingrained in *Beloved*'s famous image of the chokecherry tree and Morrison's notion of re-memory, is also offered by Elisa Bordin in her "Reimagining Family Trees." Here Bordin overturns usually provided perspectives and issues, presenting the traditional rendition of family sagas from a totally different angle: the slave trade, where black was assigned for centuries a primary and totally inexplicable role, and white is captured and framed in its long denied crucial function. From the notorious, though reluctantly publicized cross-racial story of Sally Hemings, to the admittance of the De Wolf family of its less than illustrious past, Bordin diligently uncovers long accepted denials, hindrances, hypocrisies and rooted bad conscience that clarify many of the incongruous aspects of some of the most respected American and Caribbean public families.

7 In "From Plantation to Screen, Outside Hollywood," Stefano Bosco discusses Carlos Diegues's Afro-Brazilian films. While Hollywood movies on slavery, even those which try to redress its memory, display a vision of history which privileges "the ideology of the melting pot and national reconciliation" (164), Bosco finds it more

appropriate to look outside the US in order to find radical reassessments of plantation slavery that contrast the master narrative. Diegues's films offer an excellent example of denouncing centuries of racial oppression while simultaneously showing his country's cultural vitality and the possibility of social evolution and improvement. Brazil's different historical course, with a much later abolition of slavery (25 years after Lincoln's proclamation, with the prior emancipation of the majority of slaves, so that Brazilian society never experienced anything comparable to the US Jim Crow segregation laws), explains why the dominant narrative sees Brazil as an integrationist "racial democracy" which denies the Manichaean black/white paradigm. The 1964 *Ganga Zumba* movie relies on a collective dimension of slave solidarity and a rupture of the conservative modes of film storytelling, while foreshadowing a renewed ethic and a more consistent aesthetic sensibility. Gillo Pontecorvo's notable *The Battle of Algiers* and the subsequent *Queimada*, show a Fanonian orientation in their reiterated strong anti-colonial discourse and the value of black resistance which match Diegues's filmic rendition of slave resistance in Brazil.

A very new, broad and well-organized introduction to young-adult neoslave narratives is presented by Anna Scacchi in "Telling Teens about Slavery," where the author chooses untrodden paths and not so common practices. It is interesting to see how this branch of literature confirms the modalities through which the representation of adolescence participates in the current transnational effort to face slavery and its traumatic legacy with due respect and delicacy, overcoming easy stereotypical presentations or bending towards unnecessary indulgences. In Scacchi's opinion, more than other fields, young-adult literature shapes the identity and lives of post-memory generations through "mediated images, stories, silences, and affects that need to be reckoned with" (208). The ways of exposing the images of such a violent past to the younger generations, the dangers of showing only stories of black victimization, while running the risk of a general loss of memory in the adolescents, represent a conspicuous part of the African American reaction to movies such as Tarantino's *Django Unchained* or Steve McQueen's *12 Years a Slave*. In spite of the critiques from various parts, Tarantino's Django affects the youngsters' imagination more than relevant noble figures like Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman may do. Django's abrupt way of no-nonsense killing of whites by the dozen seems to cater to the need for redemptive exceptional heroes, unburdened by racial responsibilities. With the academic consecration of the myth of the good, subservient slave, a great part of US historians conveyed the idea that American slaves accepted their bondage. Nor could the black radical tradition made almost invisible for mainstream popular and children's literature fulfill any relevant change of focus. The case of Nat Turner's controversial rebellion justifies the oblique treatment he has so far received, and the remote possibility for his figure to become a valuable hero for children. In the Caribbean, on the contrary, slave heroism was widely celebrated in stories and offered to young ones as a valuable model. If the after-bellum US narrative tried to expunge details that may have hurt children's notions of innocence and proper behavior, it is only with the neo-slave narratives of the 80s that it was possible to disclaim this convenient rendition of the slaves' meekness, showing antithetical multiple forms of everyday rebellion, together with the emphasis on the agency of black subjects. Scacchi astutely shows how adolescent literature has oriented its focus on a more accurate disclosing of violence together with the attainment of a relative detachment from the American obsession with happy endings.

In "What is Africa to me – now?" Marcus Wood examines the consequences of the African American and Brazilian dismissal of the myth of Mother Africa, confronting the US-based Saidyia Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* with Gilberto Gil's documentary *Pierre Fatumbi Verger: Mensangeiro enter dois mundos*. In both works, two slave descendants go to Africa, one to Ghana, a sub-Saharan territory seen not as a maternal presence and cradle of civilization, but as a space of horror which created the Atlantic slave trade that tainted it forever. Here the protagonist tries, albeit painfully, to give voice to the forgotten African victims, who are unable to see and imagine those things for themselves. The other protagonist, following a Conradian path in retracing the Atlantic triangle (the Caribbean, Bahia, Dahomey), and the steps of a notorious French expert, will be able to penetrate Africa's deadly secrets and face in various ways what Africa and the African heritage represent for him now. This way he becomes the diasporic counter-hero who goes into the unknown to discover the Kurtz/Verger figure and to retrieve yet another European who has gone too deeply into the heart of darkness. Both Hartman and Gil/Verger bring to the fore, as strenuously as the process may allow, their differences of vision, of historical recollection, of personal reference, of misplaced expectations. What they might harbor in their heart for the land of their ancestors, be it an Africa of commercial opportunism, moral corruption and historical evasion for Hartman, or a Brazil, where people still believe that trading slaves was a noble and honorable kind of business at which both Africans and Afro-Brazilians excelled, and again, an Africa which is still impenetrable in its essential mystery for Gil, brings forth, at its best, confusion and respect.

Following Edouard Glissant's seminal notion of rhizomatic memories and his definition of the Caribbean as an *isle-flottante*, Catherine Reinhardt's dense theoretical and visual contribution to the understanding of this complex geopolitical territory, offers a rare, refined exploration of the Eastern Caribbean and Barbadian commemorative practices as a terrain for alternative histories. Confronting the materials she gathered –which are a consistent part of her essay– with Pierre Nora's concept of "Lieux de mémoire," Reinhardt acknowledges the impossibility to aspire, as she says, either to "a system of ideas" or to a "unified memorial heritage." A singular system of thought cannot, in fact, account for the multitude of voices and perspectives as reflected both by Glissant's own *pensée archipelique*, and by the intensity and multiplicity of character of the images shown.

Praise be to Bordin and Scacchi for gathering such a relevant instrument of research, and for opening new perspectives in the field. "This is not a story to pass on."

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